

PUBLIC INFORMATION STATEMENT

Tuesday, March 23rd, 2010

...2010 Severe Weather Awareness Week for Nebraska...

Today marks the second day of Severe Weather Awareness Week for the state of Nebraska, which continues through Friday, March 26th.

Severe Weather Awareness Week provides the National Weather Service an opportunity to test communication systems and to get potentially lifesaving information out to the public. Now is the time for people to review their safety plans and be prepared for severe weather season. The topic for today is Severe Thunderstorms.

A thunderstorm is considered severe when it produces hail that is one inch in diameter or larger, damaging winds equal to or greater than 58 miles per hour, or a tornado.

There are numerous aspects of severe thunderstorms that pose a threat to life and property. Along with the threat of large hail, damaging winds, and tornadoes, everyone must also be aware of the possibility of dangerous lightning and flooding. Lightning, flooding, and tornadoes will be discussed later during the week.

Hail is produced in a thunderstorm as rising currents of air, known as updrafts, carry water droplets to a height where freezing occurs. Hail continues to grow inside of a thunderstorm until it becomes too heavy and can no longer be supported by the storm updraft. Once this occurs, the hailstone falls to the ground. Large hail is an indication that a thunderstorm is quite intense with a very strong updraft. The largest hailstone ever recorded in the United States fell in Aurora, Nebraska, with a diameter of 7 inches and circumference of over 18 inches.

Another significant severe weather threat is damaging winds, which can be caused by an event known as a downburst. A downburst is a small area of rapidly descending air beneath a thunderstorm. Once this descending air hits the ground, it spreads out in all directions. Downbursts and the resulting straight line winds can cause damage comparable to a tornado.

Anytime the threat for severe weather exists, stay updated on the latest weather information by going to the National Weather Service Website, <http://www.weather.gov>, or by tuning in to NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards, or your local television and radio station. Make sure to watch for signs for approaching storms, such as darkening skies, increasing winds, flashes of lightning, and thunder.

More information about Severe Weather Awareness Week can be found at:
<http://www.weather.gov/omaha>.